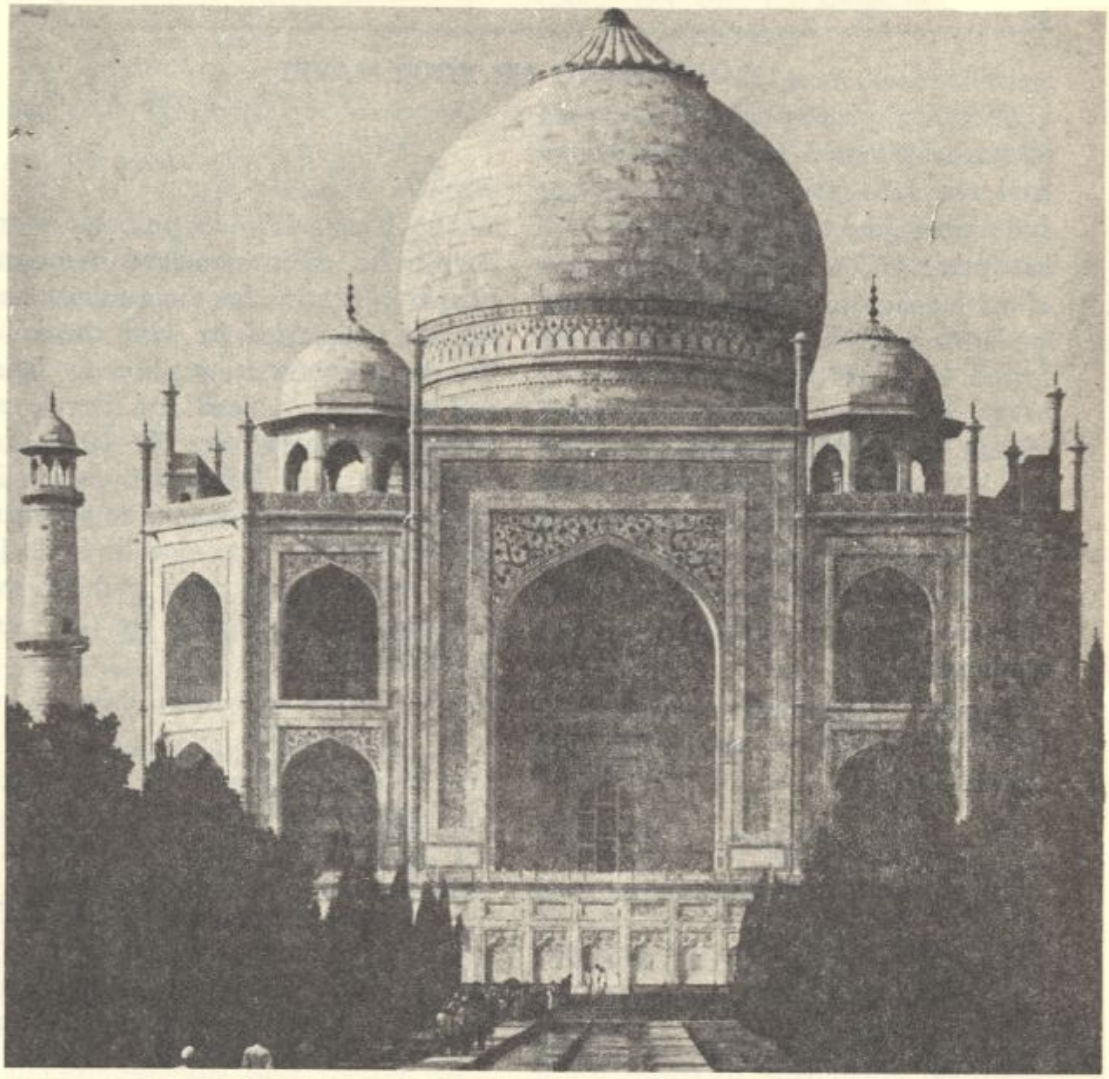
RESTORATION REVIEW



The Taj Mahal in Agra, India, is the most magnificent expression of Hindu art and religion. While we erect a skyscraper in a year or two, this monument required the labor of 22,000 men for 22 years, which illustrates the difference between industry and art.

The will that conceived the Taj Mahal may have been profounder than the will of a mighty conqueror.

See "God's Quest on the Great Religions of the World."
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Volume 10, No. 8 **Leroy Garrett, Editor** **October 1968**

DON'T HANG UP YOUR HARPS

We all pity the plight of displaced persons. Uprooted from their homeland, they are cast upon a sea of fear and uncertainty. It seems that nature has made us homebodies, for most of us manage to stay rather near the land that nourished us. When we are forced by circumstances of work or health to move faraway, our hearts remain in the land where we played as children. Even when one spends most of his years in an adopted land, it is never quite home to him, and he likes to get back to the ole swimmin' hole and the little school house and reminisce.

Samuel Woodworth caught the spirit of this in his poem *The Old Oaken Bucket:*

"How Dear to my heart are the scenes of my childhood,
When fond recollection presents them to view!
The orchard, the meadow, the deep tangled wildwood,
And every loved spot which my in fancy knew,
The wide-spreading pond and the mill that stood by it,
The bridge and the rock where the cataract fell;
The cot of my father, the dairy house nigh it,
And e'en the rude bucket that hung in the well.

The Israelites were probably more devoted to their homeland than any people in history, for their culture and religion were tied in with the land. To the prophets it was a holy land, and its most famous son could cry ever so meaningfully, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem …" David had chosen it. Solomon had adorned it. The prophets had hallowed it. And God dwelt in it.

It makes all the more pathetic the sad condition described by the poet in Psalms 137:

By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.
On the willows there we hung up our harps.

For there our captors required of us songs,

And our tormentors, mirth, saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

God’s people were in captivity in a foreign land. They had been carried far away into pagan Babylon. Away from the land and away from the temple that was now destroyed, they were a displaced and a disheartened people. They had been a people of mirth and song, a happy people, and it is noteworthy that even into captivity they had carried their harps. But they could not find it in their hearts to use them in pagan Babylon.

How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you,

If I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

The harp was a symbol of gladness and hope. David and all the people played their harps as the ark of the covenant was brought into Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:5), and David used the harp to calm the evil spirit within King Saul (I Sam. 16:23). In his description of apostasy and judgment, Isaiah includes the poignant verse “The mirth of the harp is stilled” (Isa. 24:8).

They took their harps with them into Babylon in hopes of comforting one another and communing with God. This speaks well for their spiritual concerns. Imagine being driven as a slave halfway across a continent to a foreign land, and among the few possessions you manage to take with you is a harp! Now that their city was destroyed by the hordes of Nebuchadnezzar, and the temple devastated, the harp was all they had left. It served as a symbol of all that they had loved and lost. But now in a foreign land, because of the ugly taunts of their captors, they hung their harps on the willow trees and did not use them. Instead of playing and singing they sat down and wept.

It is all so understandable. Perhaps they could have played if their enemies had not mocked them. They may have thought it irreverent to play to the cruel cry of “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” Too, they were slaves. Life was cruel. They were lonely and homesick. Their holy land lay in ruins. God must have seemed as far away as Babylon seemed cold. Yes, indeed, how could they play the songs of Zion in such circumstances!

Yet they should have played anyway. God would have heard their melody in Babylon as well as Jerusalem. If some brave soul had gone to the willows and taken down a harp and played like David played to Saul, how refreshing it would have been. And to the chant “How can we play the songs of Zion in a strange land?”, he could have replied, “This is the very place God’s praises should be played” As for the Babylonians who derided them, it would have been a marvelous testimony of the faith and hope of an enslaved people, far more than sitting down and weeping was.

Had they gone on and sung in Babylon instead of weeping, they would have been more like Paul and Silas in prison and less like Elijah under the juniper tree.

We all have our Babylons. There are reasons enough in the lives, of all of us to sit down and weep. Ours is a troubled word, and it is often cold and distressing. We may even sometimes feel like people in exile. The world seems to be moving on tiptoe amidst sleeping dogs. Security hangs by a slender thread. Nations distrust each other, and even our neighbors seem to be strangers. We are in a foreign land. Religion is going our of style or becoming so secular that there is no longer any place for harps and singing. The world derides us, the flesh opposes us, and secularism challenges us. There are evil forces aplenty that taunt us with, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”

We must not hang our harps upon the willows and weep. We must become salted with the fires of life’s hardships, and give testimony to the world of a God of love and peace. We all have harps to play. The coach out on the athletic field, the teacher in the classroom, the worker at the factory, and the statesman at his podium. We have many songs for the world to hear, all of which are inspired of God, all of which bear witness to his presence in our lives. Let’s not fail to sing them as the world affords the opportunities. The human predicament being what it is, it is hardly the time to hang up our harps and weep. The world needs to see Spirit-filled people, buoyant with faith and hope. They will listen to our harps, perhaps more than to our words.

Even life in the church can be discouraging. Those who would be truly spiritual, searching out the deeper things of God, are often mocked in one way or another. It is sometimes more difficult to be a free man in the church than it is in the world. The search for truth ends at many a church door, and those who venture beyond the appointed boundaries are not always appreciated. Even the fellowship of the saints is measured as if by a rule, and some who love Jesus as much as we are not fully accepted because of differences in color or creed.

The church itself needs to hear the songs of vibrant faith. We must agree with Elton Trueblood in viewing the church as “the world’s greatest mission field.” Those who would be free, happy and spiritual must not lose heart, not even when the church itself seems like a foreign land. Certainly we must not leave the church in search for freedom elsewhere. This would be to hang up one’s harp in despair. We must be content, as the poet urges, “to labor and to wait” and thus give witness where we can be the most effective.

The songs of life need to break forth in the personal lives of us all. We are be set with anxiety and frustration over everything from rearing children to keeping a jobor *enjoying* children and finding *meaning* in a job. Bad health, mounting debts, or ruptured personal relations can well nigh destroy us. Life is sometimes so tragic that we must weep. But the harp must not hang on a willow for long. There must be the songs of hope to make life bearable. The melodies will include forbearance, compassion, and diligence. And humor as

well, for we must keep laughing, especially at ourselves, and not take ourselves too seriously.

Some of us have harps in the poems we write or the pictures we paint, the business we run or the team we coach. One person's harp is his talent to show pity, another his talent to make money for the good of the world. Some play upon the harp by the smiles they give us, others by their grace to listen to our tales of woe.

The human predicament being what it is, we can ill afford to have harps hanging in willow trees, with much of the best of mankind sitting down and weeping. Like David before Saul, let us be at work refreshing a world that is downcast by plucking gently upon our harps.—*the Editor*

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A DEFINITION OF HELL

"Hell is that state of being bound up perpetually in an unexpanding self."—Geddes McGregor

This definition of hell might not pass in a seminar on theology, nor will it satisfy the demands for a scriptural description. But we believe it points to the *ultimate* of personal degradation, and may not be far from the meaning of the biblical symbols of hell after all. One who is stunted in physical growth, or in some way grossly deformed, we call a freak. We cruelly pay money to see such ones in a side show at a circus. How much more grotesque must be the soul that never grows! How tragic and how unbearable it would be to be imprisoned forever within the shriveled confines of a proud and egoistic soul!

This would be eternal pettiness, eternal littleness, eternal self-pity. God forbid us such a hell!

It took nine levels of hell to satisfy the imaginative mind of Dante. The lowest level of the insufferable depths was dominated not by flames buy by freezing winds and eternal ice. Even the first of the levels, which he called circles, is a prison for those who committed no sins on earth, but were unbaptized and without knowledge of Christ. Each level or circle becomes increasingly worse, consistent with the degree of the guilt of the sinner.

But even in Dante's complex description of man's destiny the chief point is that one makes his own heaven or hell in part by the way he responds to selfhood. His seventh circle of hell consists of those who have done violence to themselves. He uses much imagery, such as darkness and noise for hell and music and agility for heaven, and he explains in his commentary on the *Divine Comedy* that, while his poem is to be read liter-

ally, it also has symbolic meaning. The symbols point to those who destroy themselves through self-deception.

Plato too has a view of a self-made hell. The soul that never grows through voluntary ignorance wanders endlessly in a netherland, while the souls that grow in the face of hardship move upward toward the Good. Virtue is knowledge to Plato, and one is prepared only for hell when he deliberately chooses to be ignorant. He excuses involuntary ignorance, and finds a way, through reincarnation, to give the innocent another chance.

It is Dostoevsky, however, who seeks to come to terms with the biblical imagery of hell. He has the Russian monk in *The Brothers Karamazov* to ask pointedly, "What is hell?" The answer is that it is the suffering of being unable to love. In this life man receives an invitation from God to love, and he is shown by Christ what love means. If still he refuses, rejecting his only chance to say "I am and I love," then he is doomed to an eternity in which he can see those who love but cannot join them. Such was the rich man who saw Abraham and Lazarus in an atmosphere of love. He could not be with them because he was incapable of love. Even if taken into heaven he would be most miserable, for having despised love on earth there is no place for it in his heart in eternity. Dostoevsky can hardly see how the symbol of fire and brimstone could be literal, but he thinks a lake of fire could never be as agonizing as a soul that is eternally conscious of his rejection of love so graciously proffered.

Many of us would question Augustine's view on the literalness of hell. He says: "That hell, which also is called a lake of fire and brimstone, will be material fire and will torment the bodies of the damned" This presents grave difficulties, not the least of which is the problem of there being anything to burn. We see the body buried and know that it decays. How could it also be literally burning? Or must we believe it awaits a resurrection, at which time fire will be put to it? The scriptures hardly require us to believe such as this.

Yet Melville in his *Moby Dick* contends with this very problem. The white whale had taken Ahab's leg, and Ahab was bargaining with a carpenter to make him a substitute of wood. In the conversation Ahab assures the carpenter that he can still feel the missing leg just as if it were there, even to a hair. Then he jarrs the carpenter with these words: "If I still feel the smart of my crushed leg though it be now so long dissolved, then, why mayest thou not, carpenter, feel the fiery pains of hell for ever, and without a body? Hah!"

Our Lord does, of course, refer to the body going to hell. Matt. 5:29 is unmistakable: "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell." Matt. 10:28 is equally clear: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

We have all heard of that ravine south of the walls of Jerusalem, called Gehenna (the valley of Hinnom) , where the city's refuse was burned, and where fires had continued to burn since the time of King Ahaz, who desecrated the valley by burning little children as a sacrifice to Molech. Commentators always refer to this bit of history in reference to Jesus' warning about hell or *Gehenna*, as if this settles the question of the nature of hell.

While it is almost certain that Jesus was indeed referring to the stench and smoke of the valley of Hinnom in his reference to hell, it is highly doubtful that his hearers supposed that the damnation he was pointing to would be a ride out to the city dump. Jesus was not saying that they would be burned up in the valley of Hinnom, as a dead dog would be, if they cursed their brothers. He was talking about hell, the place of the damned, and *Gehenna* served as a fitting symbol of such horror. The rabbis before Jesus had used the same symbol. The *Talmud* says: "The sinner who desists from the words of the Law will in the end inherit Gehenna."

The symbols about hell are calculated to convey the grimest and most terrible picture. It is referred to as "the pits of nether gloom" in 2 Pet. 2:4 and as "eternal chains" in Jude 6. Sometimes the metaphors conflict: in Rev. 19:20 the wicked are "thrown alive into the lake of fire, while in Matt. 22:13 the wicked are bound hand and foot and cast into "the outer darkness." It will be difficult to have both literal fire and literal darkness.

So what does it all mean? The conclusion certainly cannot be that there is no real hell, for the imagery used not only points to its reality but also to its utterly unbearable horror. The imagery does not have to be interpreted literally, which we presume to be impossible, in order for it to convey reality. Hell is unquestionably real in Jesus' thought, and he makes it just as bad as language makes possible.

To be bound hand and foot suggests helplessness, a state that man will do nearly anything to avoid. Chains symbolize the *permanence* of the helpless state, while the lake of fire indicates torment. Darkness and nether gloom strips man of all light, suggesting his separation from God.

But the imagery does not stop here. Even in this state man can think about his past life, as does the selfish rich man in Luke 16, and even contemplate those in heaven. This story shows that the rich man had all these experiences while his body was buried in the ground (verse 22). He even speaks of "being in torment in this flame." Abraham talks to him, suggesting that he remember how selfish he was back on the earth.

So we conclude by again suggesting that McGregor's definition gets close to hell after all. It is indeed a state, it is real, and one can "go there" so to speak. It is a state of *being bound*, pointing to the enslavement that sin brings. It is *perpetual* in that it is forever, or better, it is irreversible. An *unexpanding self* is about as far from God as one can go, for it harbors pride, self-pity, and arrogance.

The weary traveler who thought hell would be "an unending line of railway terminals" may not have as good a definition as McGregor, but even here there is truth. Endless, meaningless isolation that makes only for boredom is unbearable for man. The point of the Christian message is that this is man's destination without God, and that through the Christ the way to meaningful *being* is revealed. Religion is a love story between God and man. If man rejects, yea even detests, God's loving pursuit of him, hell is the only possible consequence.

In one of his many books, C. S. Lewis dramatizes this truth. A man who has prepared himself only for hell by not cultivating the love that God makes possible is waiting at the bus stop for the bus for hell. By mistake he gets on the bus for heaven. At once he feels uncomfortable and out of place, for those on the bus are not his kind of people. Even in heaven he feels divorced, for he is nor equipped to enjoy it. The only thing he can do is to take the bus for hell, a hell he made ready by his own choices in life.

Another story about heaven and hell depicts those in hell gathered around a banquet table filled with appetizing foods, but none was eating and all were starving, for they all had stiff arms and were unable to get the food to their mouths. The scene was similar in heaven. There was the same table overflowing with delicious foods and people with stiff arms, but here the people were filled and satisfied. The difference was that in heaven the people fed each other, while in hell selfishness was so overbearing that each perished trying to fill his own stomach.

Perhaps hell is something like all this. For our purposes we can be busy doing something for others, even with stiff arms, and we can concern ourselves in being prepared for the right bus.—*the Editor*

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The Quest of God . . .

GOD'S QUEST IN THE GREAT RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD

While those who profess to be Christians in one form or another, some 900 million in all, are by far the largest of the great religions, they are far outnumbered by all the nonchristian religions combined. There are 400 million Moslems, who are improperly called Mohammedans; 350 million Confucianists; 150 million Buddhists; Hinduism numbers about 350 million.

That makes more than a billion in the four largest of the religions. There are many more in the lesser known groups. Jainism, an Indian religion, numbers only a million and a half, while Shintoism, with its 13 sects in Japan, numbers upward of 7 million; and

Taoism, one of the Chinese religions, is estimated at 43 million. While Judaism is one of the most influential of the religions, it numbers only 13 million.

This means that far more people profess the religions of the East than profess Christianity and Judaism of the West. The oriental religions likewise lay claim to greater antiquity. Lao Tze, the founder of Taoism *(Tao* meaning "the Way"), was teaching men to deny the world and set their hearts on spiritual things 600 years before Jesus was born. The priests of Hinduism were giving the world their "sacred knowledge" long before the prophets of Israel raised their voices. And it is Hinduism that has the oldest sacred literature, the Rig-Veda, which was composed something like 2500 years before Moses gave the law to Israel!

All this should cause us to pause and ask ourselves about these religions that are both larger and older than our own. Has God concerned himself with these religions, or has his interest been restricted to the Jewish-Christian tradition? Are we to say that these religions are false, that they are injurious to mankind, and inimical to Christian truth? Or has God in some way revealed himself through them, and do they preserve truths that bring men closer to heaven and to God? Should we ignore them or shall we seek to understand them? If we believe that God sent Moses, Isaiah, and the Christ, can we believe also that he sent Confucius, Zoroaster, and the Buddha?

If our response to these questions is wholly negative, which means that we cannot in anyway see the quest of God in them, then we have to conclude that through much of human history God's revelation of himself to man has been incredibly limited. The vast expanses of India and China have been largely ignored all these centuries by a loving God if he has nothing to say through Hinduism or Buddhism. There has been no witness on heaven's part to the Japanese during their long history if there is nothing at all divine in the testimony of the Buddha or Lao Tze. Indeed, God has withheld an expression of his will to the most ancient, the most cultured, and the most numerous of the nations of the world. This appears to be an impossible conclusion to draw concerning a God who *finally* gave his own Son to the world.

It is the thesis of this essay that while none of these religions is God's chosen religion, as we believe Judaism *was* and Christianity is, God has nonetheless chosen to pursue man, whom he has always loved and always wanted for himself, within the framework of all these religions. They all teach vital truths, and all truths are of God. While the way to God to which they point may be obscure, they nonetheless bring men closer to God than they would otherwise be. They are light glimmering in the darkness. If even Christians are so limited as to "look through a glass darkly," we would expect these religions to be more like satellites, reflecting something more glorious than themselves, rather than like the brightest stars. But surely there is light in them. They are not total darkness. Whatever light there is is of God.

It should be sobering to Christians to realize that they are what they are very largely because of birth and circumstance. Hardly any of us would be Christians had we not been born in the western world. Must we conclude that the first prerequisite for going to heaven is getting yourself born in the right part of the world? Is God the God of the West but not of the East? Can any of us really believe that we would be anything other than a Moslem or a Hindu had we been born in India? If China had been our birthplace would we have had no knowledge of God at all, no overture on his part toward us? Is the Hound of Heaven on men's trail only in the Western world?

It is all the more sobering for us to realize that if but one page in the annals of history had been written a little differently, we in America and all the occident might well have been Zoroastrians (or *Parsi* they call it) instead of Christians. Xerxes, the Persian monarch, back in 480 B.C. had carried his army and his religion as far as Greece. At the pass of Thermopylae he had defeated the Spartans, and only the Greek fleet stood between him and the western world. Ten years before the Greek fleet had defeated him at Marathon, but now his ships outnumbered theirs three to one, and victory was almost certain. It was one of history's greatest dramas of the sea. The Greeks destroyed 200 Persian ships, causing the terror-stricken Xerxes to flee Europe and forget his dream of conquest.

Had Xerxes won that battle he would no doubt have made all of Europe Zoroastrian. One historian thus describes the Parsi as "the religion which might have been ours." Those of us who believe that God is at work in history can believe that his purposes were realized in that battle in the Aegean sea long ago. He must have wanted Greece and Europe to be free to receive the gospel of Christ when it was brought to them 500 years later. Had Xerxes won that battle and moved on into Greece, the way would not have been open for Paul when he went to Athens in 50 A.D. It is noteworthy that Paul went west to Greece rather than east to Persia, even though it was philosophers from the *east* rather than from the west that came so far to honor the Christ's birth.

In believing that God is a history-making God we do not have to suppose that he has made only western history. Has he not raised up men in the orient as well as the occident to give testimony to his love for mankind? In fact, the Zoroastrian religion that nearly became the religion of Europe was at that time one of the most vital religions of the world. Its virtues were so remarkable that they made their way into Europe despite the Persian defeat, and lived on to become a part of the Jewish-Christian tradition that was later to emerge. Was not God then at work in ancient Persia, not only in sending the wise men to see the infant Christ (a very significant incident in the history of the orient), but also in using Zoroaster to soften the heart of Europe for the implantation of the Good News?

Zoroaster was born about 660 B.C. in Persia, and there was the tradition that his mother was a virgin. She drank milk from two virgin cows that had eaten from a sacred plant on which angels had carried the spirit of Zoroaster to earth. This is common in the

old religions. How-tsieh, one of the prophets of ancient China, was conceived when his mother "stepped upon a footprint of God," and Buddha was born as a result of his mother being struck in the side by a white elephant, which was really the spirit of Buddha. We can therefore understand how historians associate the story of Mary giving birth to Jesus by being conceived of the Holy Ghost as just one more story of "sexless births" of the founders of great religions. We can hardly say that they were crude copies of the Christian story, for these stories had long existed in various parts of the world when Gabriel made his visit to Mary in a Palestinian village. It shows, we may suggest, that men have always had unfortunate ideas about sex, that their saviours must come to them without anyone having intercourse, and the saviours themselves must not be tarnished by any such behavior. We do not hesitate to testify here to our implicit faith in the virgin birth of Jesus, and yet express appreciation of the fact that it never became a part of the Good News. It was not included in the *Kerugma* (the thing preached) and no big point is made of it by the Christian writers, with most writers of the *New Testament* not even referring to it. For this reason we would err if we tendered anything less than "the fellowship of the saints" to the brother who may be having honest difficulties with the virgin birth, though no problem at all in loving Jesus and honoring him as both Lord and Christ.

When Zoroaster died at 78, he left behind a religion of love for the earth and its fruits, whole-souled worship of one God, and a belief in the healing goodness of work. He created one of the highest ethical codes of all history, centered as it was in complete cooperation with the beneficent forces of nature. He taught that God (called *Ahura Mazda)* created the earth and then turned it over to man to till. God demands of man to be honest, kind, benevolent. He stressed good works, insisting that weedless stands of grain are more efficacious than are prayers.

To the Parsi the earth is so good that it must not be contaminated by dead bodies, so they do not bury their dead, but place the bodies on a grill in a tower so that the birds may pick the bones. God is thus described as creator of a beneficent material world, a world that will continue to bless men as long as they treat it as God's creation.

The similarities between this religion and Christianity are remarkable: both believe in one God as father and creator, and as one who is concerned for his children; both believe in a coming kingdom of God on earth; both believe in a heaven and hell, and the Parsi has its devil (Angra Mainyu) just as we have Satan. Both have their angels and archangels, and both have a belief in the resurrection of the body.

Some historians believe that Zoroastrianism, with its strong monotheism, influenced Judaism, causing it to become more monotheistic, especially after its exile in Babylon. While some of us might be uncomfortable with such a view, we can certainly say that if what Israel believed was the truth and was of God and was a blessing to the world, no less can be said for the same ideas when taught by the Parsi.

Zoroastrianism was once a vital and significant religious faith, one in quest of truth wherever it could be found. Almost certainly the Magi who visited Jesus as a child were Zoroastrian priests, who, guided by their sacred writings, were in search for fuller manifestations of the glory revealed to them. With one eye on their rich spiritual tradition and another on the stars, they calculated, aided no doubt by God's Spirit, that the world ruler had been born. They were thus literally led by the heavens to Jerusalem.

This religion has fulfilled its mission and has moved off the stage. While once attractive to millions, there are now no more than ten thousand followers of Zoroaster. But is there not evidence that God was in pursuit of the human heart in ancient Persia, using Zoroastrianism for all it was worth?

The same can be said for the other oriental religions. It is noteworthy that when a Buddhist in China is converted to Christianity he may still hold to much of his Buddhist faith and find no inconsistency between the old and the new. Some scholars insist that Christianity could just as easily have absorbed much of Buddhism as it did Judaism had the Christ not been a Jew.

Buddha's "Four Noble Truths" relative to the human predicament might serve also as a Christian explanation:

1. All existence involves suffering.

2. All suffering is caused by indulging desires.

3. All suffering will cease with the suppression of desires.

4. To achieve this one must follow the "Noble Eightfold Path" of right belief, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right endeavor, right thought, and right meditation.

Buddha rejected the caste system of his own culture, declaring truth about equality that would befit any Christian in racial-stricken America: "My doctrine makes no distinction between high and low, rich and poor; it is like the sky; it has room for all, like water it washes all alike."

But the ruling law of Buddhism was Karma, which goes a step beyond the Christian teaching of sewing and reaping, for to Buddha the effect of one's deeds carried over from rebirth to rebirth. Reincarnation is of course rather generally believed in oriental religions, as it was by Plato and other important thinkers.

There is much in Buddhism that appears both trivial and wrong to a Christian observer. When I was in Taiwan in 1963, it was my unique pleasure to spend the night in a Buddhist monastery, eating and sleeping with the monks and priests. Well before daybreak I was

awakened by the sound of gongs, piercing the cool morning air and reverberating through the isolated mountains that nestled the monastery. This went on for an hour, and was followed by the crackling of fire crackers and other weird noises. The statues of Buddha, the chants of the priests, the burning of incense, and the prayer wheels containing printed prayers all seemed ridiculous. A fellow professor, who had joined me in this strange experience, insisted that most of the wild show could be seen in any Roman Catholic Church in the United States anytime. While he may have overstated it, it is noteworthy that even professed Christians carry on in ways that appear foolish, while at the same time holding to much that is obviously good. So with Buddhism, for it made a noble effort to alleviate human misery. It was a religion of love and pity that Buddha gave to the ancient world. He spoke, for instance, of "The Nine Incapabilities" of the good man. One was that "He is incapable of deliberately depriving a living creature of life," while another was "He is incapable of sexual impurity." Much of what the Buddha wrote could claim a place alongside the Bible. For instance: "Let a man overcome anger by love, let him overcome evil by good; let him overcome the greedy by liberality, the liar by truth!" And this one: "Four things does a reckless man gain who covets his neighbour's wife—demerit, an uncomfortable bed, punishment, and lastly, hell."

But it was Confucius in ancient China that gave the world such a high social ethic. And social is the word, for Confucius gave himself to the cementing of relations between man and wife, parent and child, ruler and people, man and friend. Most oriental religious emphasize meditation and asceticism, but Confucianism sought to turn men's minds away from the eternal imponderables and to fix them upon the practical problems of daily life. He pointed to love as that which heals what is broken. He taught that we come to love men as we come to know them. "I will not be afflicted at men's not knowing me; I will be afflicted that I do not know men."

One cannot help but marvel at the wisdom of Confucius. He would only wish that the erring world could be made wiser by the likes of Confucius. The *Analects of Confucius* would surely bring men more decency, self-respect, and reverence for God and man. Confucius was surely a God-sent blessing to the Chinese.

This is our point about all these religions. There is no problem in listing their weaknesses and inadequacies. And if one wishes to argue that they are *false* religions, a case can be made here too, especially when they are compared with Christianity. The question is whether these religions gave witness to the goodness of God, and whether they were anticipations of Christianity, and intended by God to be such.

Our own Bible reveals to us the Hebrew background and how God used it to fulfill his purposes in Christ. Are we to suppose that there were no other backgrounds in other cultures likewise used of God? Are the Hebrew prophets the only prophets God had over the entire ancient world? If Isaiah pointed the way, why did not Zoroaster or Confucius?

"In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son . . . " Did not God have prophets in Greece, China and Persia as well as in Israel?

One can believe that God's fullest expression of himself is in the Christ, and yet believe that he has in various ways made himself known to all nations of earth. Our own scriptures teach us that God has never left himself without witness.

We are not saying, nor could we say, that one religion is just as good as another. We wish to avoid an indifference on the one hand that sees all religions as pretty much the same, and an arrogance on the other hand that labels all religions as vain but one's own. We are saying that there is some truth in all religions, and that this truth is of God, and that even when the truth is marred by the presence of error and folly, God can still make use of it to his glory.

It is like a range of mountain peaks, to use an illustration given by Elton Trueblood, wherein one peak rises higher than all the others, thus providing a better view of God's eternal purpose. The great religions are indeed mountain peaks of men's religious experiences. They have lifted men from the valley of despair to the mountain of hope. They are now in a position to come up even higher, if indeed their view is not obstructed by the very mountain that bears them. It is our task to beckon them to Christ, to lift them even higher. This we can better do if we view their religions as anticipations of what God offers in Christ. Wholeness comes only in Christ, and if a Buddhist or a Moslem is made whole, his wholeness will be realized where mine is realized, if I am made whole, and that is in Christ. This can: not be made to mean, of course, that God's mercy is necessarily withheld if one is not fully whole. We must avoid the blasphemy of supposing that God condemns men for an ignorance that they cannot help.

In this series on *The Quest of God* we have expressed our conviction that God is continually in quest of man, using all aspects of culture and religion to win man to himself. He is the Hound of Heaven who is in hot pursuit of man, a loving chase that may not end even in death. We have suggested that the Hound has pursued man through the arts and sciences, nature, philosophy and poetry, and even man's own consciousness.

And now we have said that the Hound follows man into the great religions of the orient. If God pursues man there, then might he find man there? The answer must be *yes*, realizing that God allows for soul growth as well as for bodily growth. Once man accepts what light God offers, there is reason to hope for even more light.—*the Editor*

Religion is the bias of civil society, and the source of all good, and of all comfort.—*Edmund Burke*

World history is the exhibition of spirit striving to attain knowledge of its own nature. —*Hegel*

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AWAY FROM HOME

ROBERT MEYERS

Every close relationship benefits from brief separations. Husbands and wives who truly love each other find that being apart occasionally makes them more fully aware of how much they mean to one another. They find it delicious to recite to each Other what has happened during their separation, uniting by their excited talk the briefly divergent stream of their life.

It is the same with churches and those who serve them. When I was away recently for a month from my beloved Riverside, I found myself stimulated to constant planning in behalf of those I had left behind. And although I enjoyed my California visit greatly, I found that at each meeting time on Sunday or Wednesday I was conscious of the miles between us. I wondered what and how my friends were doing across the time zones.

My family worshipped in three different religious denominations while we were away, a stimulating privilege we have not often had in our lives. I found myself in a veritable maelstrom of intellectual and spiritual excitement as the new environment and the different approaches stirred my mind. I scribbled furiously on the back of visitor's cards as I thought of things I wanted to do when I returned to those who so graciously grant me a base for speaking and writing.

On the first Sunday we attended a little Presbyterian church on Point Loma. We arrived about five minutes before time for the service and I was reminded at once of home, since hardly anyone else had yet appeared. Presently there were some eighty persons gathered in the lovely little chapel to worship. They patiently explained to us later that their regular minister was gone and they apologized because the guest speaker was, they thought, long-winded. He talked twenty-five minutes.

Still retaining traces of his north German accent, the speaker told us something of his work in the urban mission center for San Diego churches. His opening prayer moved my family more than any other single experience in the three church visits. I asked for a copy of it and he wrote it out as, he said, "God gave it to me." I brought it back to Wichita and made it a part of my first sermon. Riverside disciples responded to it as I had. I enjoyed also on that first Sunday an edifying and beautiful vocal solo and resolved, upon my return, to beg Bob Scott, our own fabulously talented singer, to make a similar dedication of his talents to God in our Sunday devotions.

On the next Sunday we drove to a Church of Christ some fifteen miles distant on the freeways, mainly because I had heard the minister speak when I was in college in Tennessee twenty-seven years ago. Once extremely prominent in the Church of Christ, he had passed through some stormy years. I frankly wanted to know what he would say and how much life had deepened and enriched his spiritual views, and I wanted also to experience this familiar pattern of worship after the visit to the little Presbyterian chapel.

I was acutely aware of noises in the audience, noises I had not heard the week before. One child cried noisily throughout the prayer. Other children kicked the seats innocently and happily, but noisily. It is often said by indulgent parents that children should nor distract us if we are properly devoted, but I noticed as always that there were many improperly devoted persons present—all being distracted. I put myself in the place of those who had grown up in another religious background, where quiet was cherished, and I realized how difficult it must be for them when they first come to our noisy, casual services.

The minister said few things that were offensive, but he failed to lift our spirits. I tried to analyze this as we drove home through the desert canyons of San Diego, and came to this conclusion: he was too abstract, and he was too predictable. When I call him abstract, I mean that he told us to love men but never spelled out for us what that might mean in the suburb where we were at that moment. And, of course, so long as he did not spell it Out, make it concrete, it was perfectly all right with everybody. No one ever minds being told that he ought to love people—until you tell him *which* people he ought to love that he is not now loving, and *how* he ought to love them. I made a mental note for myself: resolve, old friend, with greater firmness than ever to be concrete, to be specific, to avoid those glittering generalities to which everybody will say a happy Amen! and about which nobody will do a single blessed thing.

I said also that the minister that morning was too predictable. I meant only that in his thirty-five minute address he never said one thing I had not expected him to say. Nor did he say anything *old* in a *new* way, which is no mean accomplishment in itself. This was the profoundest disappointment of all, for I had thought that any man who had lived as long as he, and had passed through such a checkered career, would have some moments of insight that would strike lightning in my head and heart and make me go away thinking, “I am something more than when I came to this place.” But there was no blaze, even for a happy moment. Only the hoary party phrases and the dull, safe, generalized platitudes.

On the last Sunday we went to a little church we had passed often on our trips to the ocean beach. The name appealed to us: St. Peter’s by the Sea. In this Lutheran church, once again we found quiet. A note in the church program for the day informed us that a professional baby sitting service was provided. It seemed to me that this was a good thing for a church to do, so that mothers of young children could find an hour of quiet and enter

wholly into worship. Who more than mothers needs the healing touch of God without distraction on this day?

Two young boys served as acolytes, taking a taper up the aisle to light the candles before a lovely cross. Like young boys everywhere they were a bit overcome by the unusual solemnity of what they were doing and they relieved their nervous tension by shooting flickering grins at one another. I reflected on the centrality of the cross in almost all churches except some which make the baptismal tank central It is a great help for me to see the cross in tangible form and to think what that Man was like who had to die on it for giving men truth. If the sermon is poor, one can find in this symbol a launching pad for meditation.

On this day a strong conviction of mine was reaffirmed. I like organ music very much, when no one is singing with it. It can help me be in the proper mood for meditation and reverence. My soul fills with beauty and I am led to the throne of Him who is responsible for all beauty. But I do not like the organ at all when the congregation sings with it. We could not hear the words clearly. It seemed there was a competition between organ and audience to see who could finish first. The audience lost.

One has to consider how his rearing influenced him, of course, but my preference for good *a capella* music is unequivocal. I agree with that old Renaissance musician William Byrd, who wrote in 1588: “There is not any music of instruments whatsoever comparable to that which is made of the voices of men where the voices are good and the same well-sorted and ordered.”

Byrd admits that a good voice is so rare that not one among a thousand has it, but in my home congregation his percentage has been riddled. Ten years of singing under the direction of our outstanding musician have created a skilled set of “well-sorted and ordered” voices. Besides its beauty, if we can believe Byrd, singing “doth strengthen all parts of the breast, and doth open the pipes.” I found when I returned home to Riverside that nothing inspires me more than a lovely hymn sung by devoted Christians who believe that they should make their gift to God as beautiful and perfect as humanly possible.

I like the congregational confession of sin which I heard in both the Lutheran and Presbyterian churches. There must be some mornings when that confession comes from individual hearts with passionate sincerity. I also enjoyed a comment written at the bottom of the program note. It said: “Informal attire is always acceptable at this church for worship services. Do not let the change of clothing for a family outing keep you from attending services. God looks on the inner man.”

I have thought a great deal since about another printed comment in that same program note. “An appeal for food for the striking farm workers in Delano, California has been made by the San Diego County Council of Churches. Canned goods of all kinds (except

pork and beans). Packaged (dried) pinto beans are desired. All donations should be brought to our church kitchen for delivery."

This kind of appeal is highly unlikely in most Churches of Christ. It is our contention, generally, that this is an affair between management and labor and no business of ours. In a now-classic case, a Texas minister lost his financial support when he tried to get fair treatment for exploited Mexican workers. So I asked myself that morning, Is this a proper action for united Christians to take? Has Christ any concern with whether some small segment of our population is treated justly in the matter of wages? Does He care? If He does, then we have to care too, of course, because we are His body to do His work on this earth.

But does He care? Do Christians have any responsibility for encouraging workers who are not paid fairly nor given the protections most of us enjoy? Most of the workers in this case were probably Mexican-Americans. Some of the employers were undoubtedly prominent in some San Diego churches. What do you suppose the latter thought of the San Diego County Council of Churches? I suppose there must have been some fireworks over that action, but then aren't things dull only when the church is droning its platitudes and mumbling its drowsy generalities?

When I went home from church on that last Sunday I looked for a long time at the church and entertainment sections of the newspaper. They were conveniently close together. The variety of church listings was staggering. Among the more exotic brands were the Christadelphians, the spiritualists, the Swedenborgians, and the Self-Realization Fellowship founded by Paramahansa Yogananda. The Christadelphians were trying to lure folk to their place by sensational sermon topics, a device few ministers can resist if there is much pressure on them to prove their worth by the crowds they pull. The morning topic for the Christadelphians was: Casket Designed For Topside Stacking. Three Biblical texts were cited to support this bizarre offering, but I never was quite sure what the point was. The evening topic was: Israel Awaits Syrian Decision: Today's Headlines Scooped by the Bible!

I sat there thinking how much more exciting that would be than a sermon on how Christians should respond to economic injustices, or social discriminations, or racial prejudice; or sermons on how individual Christians may battle greed, malice, envy, or loveless lust. That evening's sermon could, I thought, serve two needs many churchgoers have: first, the need to turn the Bible into some kind of strange, remote, mysterious magic which can anticipate today's headlines by thousands of years, and which even though we do not study it systematically can at least be handled with reverence and kept in our houses as charms; and second, the need we have to look far away at remote problems so that we can take our minds off the ones under our feet. It is obviously more exciting to wonder

about what Israel and Syria will do than it is to decide what *we* will do in San Diego at our work, with our neighbors, to our friends.

What a hunger we have for sensationalism. “Show us a sign,” the disciples pleaded with Jesus. He taught them instead how the kingdom of right relationships was like a seed slowly unfolding, pushing up through the soil, unfurling its blades, nourishing its tender fruit buds, coming quietly and slowly to fruit time and harvest. But they preferred quick magic.

“When will the end of things come?” they asked; when will the great final catastrophe engulf the wicked and the dramatic rescue of the good be effected? “I do not know the times and hours for such things,” He replied; “this is in God’s hands; do your work while it is day. Go on with the daily business of living and make a good job of it.” But he lost some of their attention when he talked of such quiet, simple things.

It really is hard, isn’t it, to believe in the value of quiet, motionless moments? Perhaps this is why we downgrade the immense significance of the worship hour on Sunday morning. That time of quiet, of waiting, of opening up to the deep tides of the sea of God is neither so highly valued nor so diligently prepared for as it ought to be. In our frenziedly busy times, when activism is praised by many as the chief or only good, it is hard to think that worship is worth the time spent in it. Our problem, as Pat Harrell has pointed out in a splendid bulletin from Houston, is that we do not realize how importantly men may be moving ahead when they are quite still and rapt in awed discoveries.

Finally, I received on that last Sunday morning a powerful shock as it dawned on me for the first time how many places offered spectacle and entertainment and how few notices there were of opportunities to serve. It seemed suddenly amazing to me that there was not, on the church page at least, a list of OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE, a catalog of specific things that needed to be done by Christian volunteers that very day. A telephone number to call where someone needed help; an institution which would be grateful for two hours of your work in the name of the Lord. I got to dreaming of some church page editor on a large daily whose duty it would be to collect and sort out the cries for help and the opportunities to do something with ears, or tongue, or hands.

Then, on a Sunday morning, I could say to myself: “After my worship experience, where will I go today to put my emotion to work, to *do* some useful thing in the name of my God?” I would consult the list, make a call, be accepted, and hurry off to join others who like myself had volunteered in the name of our common Master. I might ask, out of some idle interest, what the fellow with the shovel or scrub brush on my left was, and learn he was a Baptist or a Quaker or a Congregationalist, but our peripheral differences would not matter much as we painted or lifted or scraped. Another dream, true enough, but the world has ever and again been saved by dreams. Especially God’s.—*Wichita State U., Wichita, Kan.*

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BOOK NOTES

The Self-Revelation of God by Kenneth Kuntz is a most suitable book for review in a journal whose present theme is "The Quest of God," for this is a study of deliberate self-disclosures on God's part on man's behalf. It is a treatment of the transcendent (beyond history and nature) and immanent (involvement in history and nature) character of God. The author believes that Israel's conviction of being a called people was based upon the many experiences she had with God's self-revelation. It is a study of biblical theophanies, which he defines as "a temporal manifestation of the deity to man involving visible and audible elements that signal God's real presence." He deals especially with the unusual experiences of Moses (the burning bush), Elijah (the still small voice) and Isaiah (who *saw* and *heard* God in the temple). The price is 7.50 in hardback. That is expensive, but it is that kind of a book.

The New Testament and Criticism by George Eldon Ladd is the kind of book our people should read. It asks, *How is the Bible the Word of God?*, a question we have hardly yet asked ourselves, much less answered. Mr. Ladd refers to a statement he had heard at a prayer meeting, "I am glad that we find in the Bible the Word of God, not the words of man." He shows that this view is both right and wrong, for in a very important and vital sense the Bible is the words of men. And yet it is the Word of God, and he shows how this is. But the book is also a study of criticism-textural criticism, linguistic criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, historical criticism. The author, a conservative, concludes that those who believe in the Bible as the Word of God need have no fear of higher criticism. He says, "Evangelicals cannot be satisfied simply to recognize and defend the Bible as the Word of God; they must examine thoroughly the dimensions of the Bible as the words of men." It is 3.95 in hardback, and it is a lot of education for that price.

The Divided Mind of Modern Theology by James D. Smart is for those interested in the recent developments in theological thought, especially of Barth and Bultmann, who represent the divided minds suggested in the title. Modern theology is terribly divided, and those of us interested in the oneness of all Christians need to be aware of this aspect of the problem. The author seeks to clarify the alternatives offered by Barth and Bultmann, thus making place for more general dialogue in theology. Those who haven't time or inclination to plough through a lot of Barth and Bultmann will find their views clearly summarized

and interpreted, thus giving the reader a fairly good picture as to what has happened in modern theology. The price is 7.50.

New Directions in Theology Today (Vol. 4): The Church, by Colin W. Williams is a study of the nature and mission of the church. In recent decades there has been a lot of radical change in the church's thinking about itself. Ecumenicity would bring us the one great church, while the more secular thinkers are willing to strip the church of its institutional forms. In these days of "religionless Christianity" the nature of the church needs crucial study. This volume does this, with chapters on the church's ministry as well as its mission. The traditional views are all examined in the light of the pressing demands of the modern world. Only 2.45 in paperback.

More Than a Man Can Take by Wesley C. Baker is one of those rare instances of a book that the author *had* to write. The Book of Job came to mean so much to Mr. Baker, and its lessons so impelling, that he could not help but tell the story as he sees it. He does, indeed, pass along many helpful interpretations, and his outline of the book, the paraphrases of the speeches, and the relevance he finds in it all for today are superbly done. The conversation between God and Satan about Job he calls "A Little Celestial Bargain," and the role of Job's three friends he calls "When Friends Shout Advice from Safe Ground." He shows how the friends represented society's best, and how Elihu represents the voice of youth with remarkable parallels to our time. He thinks the happy ending, in which all Job's fortunes are returned, is unnecessary and even a moral disappointment, for what is really important is Job's victory of faith. Once he acclaimed his faith it did not matter what happened to him. Mr. Wesley has done some important thinking and his book is significant. At 2.25 it is a real bargain.

While it is not a new book, we call your attention to *Which Books Belong in the Bible? A Study of the Canon* by Floyd V. Filson. It answers the questions people are always asking about the Bible: How did a writing become part of the Bible? Why were some books left out that might have been included? Who determined this? How about the Apocrypha? Is the *Old Testament* Christian scripture? It is a book that will teach you much about how your Bible came to be the Bible, and that is important. 3.50.

Again we call to the attention of C. S. Lewis enthusiasts that R. B. Cunningham's C. S. *Lewis: Defender of the Faith* is available for 5.00. As the title suggests, it treats Lewis as an apologist or defender of the Christian faith.

This 1968 edition (Volume 10) of *Restoration Review* will be issued in bound volume, entitled "The Quest of God." 200 pages, plus introduction and index, with colorful dust jacket, matching the earlier volumes. Only 3.00. Please place your order now, but you need not pay now.

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Let us remind you that you can receive this journal for only $1.00 a year or six names for only $3.00.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

Some things therein rather shock me. However I am confident that I have reason to believe that you will embrace nothing but what you believe will help you on your way to heaven.—*Alabama*

Your insights and probing into the subconsciousness of our brotherhood and its principles are not only stimulating, but very much needed.—*Minnesota*

I found your last issue of the *Restoration Review* interesting. Though there were some inaccuracies in the story (about ACC), the account was basically true to the facts. Such things make me extremely glad that I am not an administrator. It is a hard line to walk between supporting what a constituency wants done and allowing freedom of individual expression.—*Abilene*

The healing of the gaping wound in America's side will come only as men tear out the shrapnel of hate and bind the wound with the cords of Christlike love. Vengeance must be replaced by forgiveness. Christians must pray for America as they have never prayed before. They must start practicing Christian brotherhood where they have only talked about it before. This means they must learn to enjoy the company of Christians whose skin differs from theirs.—Charles Boatman, Missouri

It is magnificent! The Sunday following Mr. King's murder I too brought a sermon on the subject entitled *Race, Racism, and Christianity.* Brother Meyers has articulated my sentiments in a much better way than I was able.—*Hugh M. Olson, California*

Will you please send me 3 copies of "Can We Understand,.", by Rev. Robert Meyers of the Riverside Church of Christ, Wichita, Kansas, taken from April issue of *Restoration Review.* I saw this at a friend's and enjoyed it very much, and I wish copies of it.—*Mrs. S. D., Wichita, Kansas*

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